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THE NEW JERSEY NAVAL MILITIA³

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A frequent question asked is "What is the New Jersey Naval Militia Joint Command (NJNMJC)?". The term "naval militia" is defined in Title 10 of the U.S. Code as a component, along with the National Guard, of the organized militia. Unfortunately, militia has come to be associated with extremist groups that belie its proud heritage. Nevertheless, the organization has proven to be a valuable complement to New Jersey's military forces in these troubled times.

Naval militias predate the reserve system and functioned primarily as a back-up force for the U.S. Navy. At its high water mark around the turn of the last century, twenty-six states had a naval militia. With the advent of the USNR, naval militias evolved into organizations with a dual state and federal mission much like the National Guard. By law, they must be composed of at least 95% drilling naval reservists in order to receive federal support. The New Jersey Naval Militia was founded in 1894 and organized into three battalions. While not exactly state-of-the-art equipment, the navy did provide a monitor and a sailing man-of-war for training purposes. Subsequently, the New Jersey Naval Militia was activated for every major conflict from the Spanish-American War through the Korean War at which time peak strength of 3,950 officers and enlisted personnel was achieved. Starting in the late 1950s, the militia was gradually absorbed by the USNR resulting in disbandment in 1963.

In 1999, Governor Christie Whitman recognized the need for a state waterborne force and reactivated the naval militia as a joint command consisting of a regiment with three battalions. However, unlike its predecessor, the NJNMJC is a hybrid with the 1st Battalion being a true naval militia, the 2nd Battalion performing as an operational Naval State Guard, and the 3rd Battalion providing support and auxiliary functions. The concept of operations differs from a traditional reserve or guard unit in that it is based on volunteerism. Essentially, each member is required to donate two days each month for actual missions in support of state and federal agencies. Additional mission requirements result in being placed on state active duty with pay and allowances.

The authorized strength of the NJNMJC is 3,000 with the organization being designed to accommodate up to 4,000 members and more than 70 vessels. Currently, the NJNMJC has 200 sworn members, most assigned to the 2nd Battalion, with many more in some stage of processing. Most members have a sea service background, but there are small army and air state guard contingents fully integrated into NJNMJC operations. A recently signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Navy has opened the way to recruiting naval reservists for the 1st Battalion. It is anticipated that 800-1,000 of these men and women will bring their skills to the NJNMJC in the next few months and provide unique service to New Jersey in times of emergency or natural disaster. MOUs with the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Marine Corps are also in the works.

Basically, the NJNMJC is a force multiplier assisting with state and federal missions. The NJNMJC is described as a "niche marketer," fulfilling needs and providing capabilities where little or none existed before. In addition to providing the heretofore-missing waterborne component of New Jersey's military forces, the Command also furnishes several specialized services. For instance,

³ This article was originally published in the March 2002 edition of "Shipmate", the publication of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association. It has been modified slightly for this purpose.

it has a team trained in water rescue and firefighting, a unit of experienced chaplains, and a Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT). In the future, a diving unit and a fixed wing air capability will be added. All of these assets are being utilized to provide support for the following primary missions:

- Weapons of Mass Destruction/Homeland Security.
- Marine Police & Other Law Enforcement Agencies.
- N.J. State Emergencies (e.g., Hurricane or Flood).
- N.J. National Guard Counterdrug Task Force.
- Special N.J. Projects & State Guard Missions (e.g., OPSAIL 2000).
- Battleship New Jersey (BB-62).
- Youth Programs.

The NJNMJC is headquartered at Fort Dix, NJ, conducts logistics and other supporting functions at the NJNMJC Armory in Plainfield, NJ, and operates vessels from the U.S. Coast Guard Station at Sandy Hook, NJ. The current inventory includes four 23' twin outboard, cabin class patrol boats, one 46' buoy tender undergoing refit at the Naval Ship Yard in Philadelphia, PA, one 28' diesel jet boat, and one 26' diesel surfboat.

While the NJNMJC has been activated several times in its brief history, the defining event in its evolution and that of the nation was the terrorist disaster on 11 September, 2001 (9/11). In the 120 days since that horrendous event, the NJNMJC has provided over 2,800 man-days in support of New Jersey and surrounding states in the following areas:

- Officer-in-Charge of the military Joint Operations Center which has been manned 24/7 since 11Sep01.
- Waterborne security for the George Washington Bridge.
- Waterborne transportation for governmental agencies between Ground Zero and the Forward Command Post at Liberty State Park, NY.
- Chaplain services at Ground Zero and the Staten Island, NY Logistics Support Base.
- Development and presentation of an anthrax awareness program to all N.J. National Guard troops in the field.
- Physical security augmentation at Fort Dix and the Naval Air Station at Lakehurst, NJ.
- Waterborne security patrols at the Salem, NJ Nuclear Power Plant.
- Logistical support at Ground Zero for the DMAT.
- Warehouse management for the Salvation Army.

Shortly after 9/11, several navy, army and air guard officers formed the Strategic Planning Group to develop the organization that was essentially adopted by the State of New Jersey for Homeland Security. In the intervening period, the Group has continued to formulate plans for the deployment of hundreds of soldiers and sailors for the protection of New Jersey's populace and infrastructure.

Since the article first appeared in "Shipmate" in March 2002, there have three changes of administration in New Jersey yielding new leadership for the state's military forces. Unfortunately, the transition was not a pleasant one and politics intervened to the detriment of the NJNMJC. Despite the many benefits delineated in this article of having a robust state guard and naval militia, there has been neither funding nor recognition for almost five years. Accessions and promotions

have been frozen for the same period. Nevertheless, an intrepid band of over 100 men and women continue to train voluntarily in preparation for the next crisis. Currently, there is a new proposal being forwarded to the Governor that will resolve this impasse one way or the other.

As the modern naval militia concept moves into the future, there are several issues that will need to be addressed including arming NJNMJC personnel and granting them limited law enforcement powers as the Command continues to assist a sorely over-taxed U.S. Coast Guard. In the current climate, it has become necessary consider assuming the "Brown Water" role, which has all but disappeared since Vietnam and transition from a "Weekend Warrior" mentality to 24/7 model of service. Perhaps, the Naval Militia may ultimately form the basis for a Naval National Guard. In any event, the Command remains confident that it is an invaluable resource in service to the citizens of New Jersey.